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ABSTRACT

This publication is the second in a series of monographs developed as a resource for middle-level leaders. It presents case studies at three fictional schools to show variations in improvement efforts and to examine faculty members' participation in the process. The teachers at one school were informed about change initiatives but were never meaningfully engaged in the decision-making process. At another school, some teachers were included in their improvement process, but the involvement was superficial and intermittent. In the last case, change efforts were systemic and all teachers were meaningfully engaged in all aspects of the improvement process. The monograph claims that the degree and manner in which teachers are involved in the change process makes a crucial difference in the successful implementation of a program. It highlights the need to engage faculty members in continuous change, encouraging them to buy into the values and beliefs of the school's mission statement, and outlines the basic components of school improvement. It emphasizes the need to clarify values and beliefs, vision and goals, and action plans. The text cautions that not everyone wants change and that there will be dissension, and it advises leaders to envision change as a slow, steady journey. (Contains 13 references.) (RJM)

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Engaging Teachers in the School Improvement Process

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NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF MIDDLE LEVEL SCHOOLS
TURNING POINTS: RECOMMENDATIONS INTO ACTION

ENGAGING TEACHERS IN THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

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About This Series

This publication is the second in a series of monographs developed by NASSP's National Alliance of Middle Level Schools as a resource for middle level leaders. The contents are recommended practical strategies, procedures, and ideas to enable school leaders to successfully plan and implement programs that will provide opportunities for students to be prepared for high school and beyond.

These monographs focus on implementing the recommendations put forth in *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, published by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. They offer clear and concise procedures for successful implementation in a variety of school communities.

Jerry W. Valentine is the editor for this monograph series. He is the director of the Middle Level Leadership Center and a professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri, Columbia. The center works with NASSP and the Association's National Alliance of Middle Level Schools Advisory Council in identifying and developing topics for this monograph series.

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Engaging Teachers in the School Improvement Process

School improvement teams can be powerful vehicles for engaging teachers in the change process. This monograph addresses various issues related to the use of teams and ways school leaders can use these teams to move faculty members through the school improvement process. We will also discuss the ups and downs of school change and what leaders can expect to encounter in the difficult journey that is school improvement.

To approach this discussion about engaging teachers in the change process, we present case studies of three fictional schools to show variations in improvement efforts and faculty members' participation in the process. The teachers at one school were informed about change initiatives at their school, but were never meaningfully engaged in the decision-making process. Another middle school included some teachers in their improvement process, but the involvement was superficial and intermittent. Change efforts at a third school were systemic, with all teachers meaningfully engaged in all aspects of the improvement process from inception through implementation. The work of these teachers will be examined in more detail throughout this discussion.

Pine Ridge Middle School

Pine Ridge Middle School was involved in a school improvement process for roughly one year with few noticeable results. While faculty members were periodically updated on proceedings, no teachers were significantly engaged in the process.

As a result of meetings with district supervisors, administrators decided that an improvement plan was needed in their school. Because two school administrators had prior experience with school improvement efforts, the school opted to save money and not hire an outside consultant to assist them with the process.

A majority of the teachers at Pine Ridge were either unaware of the improvement efforts at their school or were inadequately informed about the processes and results. As is often the case when faculty members are uninformed about proceedings, interest among teachers varied widely. Many teachers viewed the process as an upper-level mandate that they had to "deal with until it blew over or something else came up." Others were genuinely concerned, sensing that changes were in store because "we wouldn't be involved in school improvement unless we were doing something wrong." Small groups of teachers appeared to have banded into cliques, teacher collaboration was down, and gossip spread about the process and impending changes.

Administrators shared the school's mission, vision statement, and action plans at the September faculty meeting with little fanfare. A handful of teachers read the documents, but most glanced over the plan and, not seeing their names in print, filed the plans away with other beginning-of-the-year forms. Sensing no outward displeasure or opposition, the administrative team adopted the plan and the members expected full implementation. As the school year progressed, however, it became apparent that the faculty was not committed to the plan and did not fully support its implementation. The administrative team tried in vain to rally teachers behind the plan and initiate significant changes, but after several months of anguish it was viewed as a lost cause.

Riverside Middle School

Riverside Middle School was involved in a school improvement process for roughly two years, yielding minor scheduling changes and a

variety of staff development opportunities. The process brought about no significant long-term results in the school's culture or in classroom practice.

School administrators initiated the change efforts and hand-picked several teachers to join them on a school improvement team. After one get-to-know-you social event, the team set forth with their challenge of creating Riverside's mission and vision statements and writing an action plan for school improvement. The principal was familiar with school improvement processes, and the team opted to follow improvement guidelines suggested by their accreditation organization.

Faculty members were initially curious about the work of the school improvement team. Some teachers were excited about the process, thankful that something was being done to push the school in a positive direction. These teachers were generally supportive of the process and often impatient with the "slow pace" taken by the team; however, other teachers in the building were cautious and even fearful of the team's work, anxious about changes that might result from the improvement plan. These teachers were often pessimistic and critical of the team's performance, creating division between themselves and other teachers.

While the school improvement team included some teachers, most staff members were only minimally involved in the school improvement process. Team members regularly shared results of their work with their colleagues, but the faculty as a whole was never involved in discussions about values and beliefs or mission and vision statements. These documents, as well as the action plan for school improvement, were written by the school improvement team and presented to the faculty for approval. Faculty members initially accepted this procedure, seemingly glad they were removed from the additional workload.

However, as the process unfolded, teachers grew concerned and frustrated, fearful that the actions of a few teachers would have serious implications for their own classrooms. The members of the school improvement team faced immense pressure from some colleagues and an us vs. them mentality began to filter into faculty conversations. The faculty adopted the school improvement plan by a narrow margin, but many teachers gave the plan little chance to succeed. After roughly a year of planning and a year of half-hearted implementation with marginal support from the faculty, the administration quietly phased out the major components of the plan.

Oak Creek Middle School

Oak Creek Middle School has been engaged in a school improvement process for roughly four years, and the faculty is committed to the continual refinement and implementation of their school improvement plan. Teachers, administrators, students, and parents have begun noticing changes in the school's culture and in the way teachers and students interact during the learning process.

The school improvement process was initiated by building administrators and supported by a large percentage of the school community. School leaders discussed continual improvement with the entire faculty and identified several teachers who wanted to serve on the school improvement team. Although two administrators were familiar with procedures for strategic change, the school used an outside resource person to assist the team members in moving the faculty through a systemic improvement process. The resource person met quarterly with the team for the first two years of the project and continued to meet semi-annually with them through the implementation process. Each work session was six to eight hours long.

The group initially progressed through a team building and knowledge-gathering period in which members became comfortable working with each other, established norms of communi-

cation, and learned about their roles in the process. The team members then brought the faculty members into the process of identifying the school's values and beliefs, writing mission and vision statements, and developing school-wide goals and action plans to move the school toward fulfilling the vision. In addition, members of the team served as resources to teachers as they explored such effective schooling issues as school culture, the teaching-learning process, data-based decision-making, and the processes of systemic school improvement.

The faculty as a whole was initially excited about the school improvement process—some teachers thought such a move was long overdue; however, support for the initiative was not unanimous, and several teachers openly voiced their concerns about school change. Conversations among faculty members were generally positive, although faculty members experienced several periods of anxiety and discomfort as they progressed through the process. Rather than ignoring the difficulties, the team members worked with their colleagues, encouraging open dialogue and shared decision-making and viewing anxiety and uneasiness as natural parts of the change process.

Team members believed it was crucial for other teachers to have an investment in the process, so they made every effort to involve their colleagues in meaningful ways. Team members led the faculty through numerous activities, some of which focused them on particular issues and procedures and some that simply encouraged professional dialogue about the state of their school.

Each phase in the systemic school improvement process—discussion of the school's values and beliefs, development of mission and vision statements, and writing of goals and action plans—built on previous work of the faculty. Every teacher was directly involved in writing action plans. Faculty members were well-informed throughout the process and were generally committed to the successful implementation of their work. As a result, the action plans they developed were highly successful, and improvement and growth continue to be priorities of all members of the school community. New goals and action plans continue to evolve as the school improvement team provides support for change to the faculty and leadership. Faculty conversations commonly address students' needs, effective instruction, and relevant curriculum issues. The school has steadily evolved into a continuous learning organization.

Critiquing the Three Approaches to Change

What made the change process more effective at Oak Creek than at the other two schools? The most significant difference lies in the degree and manner in which teachers were involved in the change process from its conception through its continuous implementation. Teachers are typically expected to be involved to various degrees in their school's improvement processes; however, teachers are too often expected to implement plans they did not have any part in writing and may not even support or understand. The success of change initiatives lies in the meaningful involvement of teachers: if teachers are invited and even expected to be part of decision-making processes, they are more likely to be committed to successful implementation.

Faculty members at Pine Ridge Middle School were not involved in the development of the school improvement plan; the administrative team made all decisions and most teachers were therefore either unaware of the change efforts or were not well-informed about the process. When the administrators completed the plan and expected it to be implemented, teachers did not understand their role in the process and did not value the work that was expected of them.

Likewise, a majority of the teachers at Riverside Middle School were excluded from the decision-making process. While Riverside Middle School administrators included a number of teachers on the school improvement team, they did not establish the structures necessary to include the rest of the faculty in a continuous change process. A majority of Riverside's faculty members did not "own" the improvement plan, nor were they significantly involved in the improvement process. Without a vested interest in the change efforts, the teachers were not committed to the decisions made by the team or to the extra work necessary for successful implementation of the plan.

The administration at Oak Creek also included a number of teachers on their school improvement team, but faculty involvement was taken to a higher level throughout the change process. All teachers were included in initial conversations about school improvement, establishing professional dialogue as a faculty-wide expectation. The outside resource person engaged the team in school improvement activities, in effect modeling processes with the team that they could use to engage the entire faculty. The team reflected on their experiences and outlined systematic plans for including other teachers in decision-making processes. All teachers at Oak Creek were therefore included in virtually every step of the school improvement process. Teachers understood the process and did not feel removed from the decisions that would ultimately affect their own practice. In addition, teachers collaborated with other faculty members, learned about components of effective schooling, and developed a heightened awareness of the state of their school.

Are schools that do not include all faculty members in change processes relegating themselves to marginal success or eventual failure? Does the meaningful engagement of teachers in change processes guarantee unblemished success? For school change to be successful, those affected must believe in the changes they will experience. Being aware of work completed by others is not sufficient; teachers must internalize the processes for change and buy into decisions made as a faculty. School leaders—administrators and teachers—must feel ownership of plans and actions if they are to succeed. The most effective way to accomplish this is to include all parties in thoughtful and meaningful roles that contribute to a continuous improvement process.

Engaging Faculty Members in Continuous Change

For decades, the term "school leaders" implied building-level administrators or principals. Recently, however, scholars and practitioners have challenged this notion of leadership, emphasizing the importance of shared leadership and the development of effective teacher leaders. School leadership is no longer bound to a position, rather it is a "concept transcending individuals, roles, and behaviors" (Lambert, 1995). Anyone—teachers, parents, students, and administrators—can be a leader. Furthermore, engaging people in leadership processes helps establish a climate in which adults can converse with their colleagues, reflect on their own actions, and construct new ideas and understanding about effective schools. Leaders who are successful in shaping collaborative cultures use a subtle kind of leadership that engages and even empowers other members of the school. In such situations, leadership truly becomes collaborative (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996).

The school improvement team is a structure that empowers teachers to assume leadership roles in their school. It is responsible for involving the rest of the school in the improvement process. Teacher leaders are not included on the school improvement team to make decisions on behalf of their colleagues; team members must be more than just representatives for other teach-

ers. The improvement team takes the lead in involving the rest of the school in the improvement process and serves as an "advance agent for change" in the school, learning the dynamics of school improvement through group activities before engaging the rest of the faculty in those same activities (Maeroff, 1993, p. 14).

Decisions about school change stem directly from conversations, actions, and reflections of the faculty as a whole. Team members facilitate the school improvement process, serving as resources for other teachers, leading groups through the difficult nuances of change, and celebrating successes with their colleagues. The team is responsible for creating the conditions necessary for the school to develop into a learning organization and providing the necessary leadership for implementing the systemic change improvement process (Keefe and Howard, 1997).

Using teams in the school improvement process affords schools opportunities that might not exist otherwise. Teaching has traditionally been a profession of isolation, where teachers are often confined to their classrooms, rarely conversing with colleagues on matters directly related to their own professional development. Teaming can produce a "sense of community and of shared commitment" in schools that helps diminish teacher isolation and uncertainty about effectiveness (Maeroff, 1993, p. 9). Teaming encourages collaboration and helps teachers establish a shared understanding of what is important in their school. It is very difficult for teachers in traditional settings to make positive changes beyond their own classroom. School improvement teams establish teachers as leaders so they can stimulate schoolwide involvement by serving as role models and mentors to other teachers (Maeroff, 1993).

Finally, schools that include teachers on improvement teams and make conscious efforts to engage faculty members in the improvement process typically do not face the accusation that change efforts are mandated from those outside the school. When members of an organization believe an initiative is imposed upon them, they often react to the mandate just as the human body reacts to an unwanted virus. When faced with a mandate, members of organizations focus their efforts not on sustaining the change, but on eliminating its existence (Cunningham and Gresso, 1993).

The challenge for school leaders is to create conditions in which members of the school community not only realize the need for the change, but also support the change efforts and feel ownership in the processes and results. Including teachers on the leadership team and in crucial stages of the decision-making process reassures members that they are essential to their school's improvement.

Members of the Oak Creek school improvement team were committed to involving their colleagues in conversations about effective schooling. As members of the team, they were immersed in readings about good schools and best practices and could easily have made informed decisions about the direction of their school; however, they realized that any schoolwide decisions they made would not truly reflect the values and beliefs of all members of the school.

Members created study groups to immerse their colleagues in readings about effective schooling. The team regularly met with an external expert who engaged them in activities and experiences designed to increase their knowledge about best practices and the improvement processes. Team members then engaged the rest of the staff in those same activities and facilitated discussions about critical issues of education. As a result, team members—rather than an outside facilitator or school principal—led colleagues in collaborative school change efforts.

Teachers who previously balked at change efforts initiated by upper-level leadership were

more receptive to ideas presented by fellow teachers. More important, all faculty members were significantly involved in making informed decisions in the planning process. Teachers knew their ideas were valued and important to the success of the school. The Oak Creek School Improvement Team developed an understanding of the basic processes of school improvement and applied those processes effectively.

Basics of School Improvement

In a comprehensive study of school restructuring efforts across the country, Newmann and Wehlage (1995) found that school improvement efforts are helpful only to the extent that they focus on two critical components: "advancing the intellectual quality of student learning and the nurturing of professional community" (p. 14). Improvement efforts must attend to the development of a collaborative school culture in which members strive to improve the teaching and learning process for all students. Teams should maintain a focus on effective pedagogy, school culture, and the successful implementation of a school improvement process that engages all members of the school community. Teachers and administrators must individually and collectively examine the way things are done in their school and how they relate to each other inside and outside the classroom.

Each member of the school improvement team must understand, internalize, and believe in all components of the improvement process before the team can successfully engage other faculty members in strategies to help them internalize the process. Many school improvement processes and models exist, and there is no magic formula to assist leaders in choosing the one that is right for their school. Successful school improvement, however, must involve all faculty members in meaningful, thoughtful ways. The success of the process depends on it.

All planning decisions within the systemic improvement process build on the values and beliefs of the organization and are supported by the organization's mission or purpose. The organizational values and beliefs must reflect the entire faculty's views and stem from candid schoolwide conversations about schooling. The school improvement team must engage the faculty in activities that generate:

- A brainstormed list of values and beliefs
- A more-focused list encompassing values and beliefs supported by a majority of the faculty
- A prioritized list of the values and beliefs that are at the heart of what the faculty believes to be true.

A mission statement is not as essential to the overall school improvement process, but the team should involve the entire faculty in a process that results in a statement about the purpose of the school. The development of values, beliefs, and mission statements is critical to subsequent pieces of the improvement process. These statements reflect what school members hold closest to their hearts and what they believe to be their purpose. These concepts feed into and guide the organization's vision, which provides a look at what the organization will be like in the future.

A school's vision statement, which should directly reflect the core values and beliefs of the faculty, can be written by a few individuals, but it must be a result of faculty-wide efforts. Faculty feedback should further shape the vision statement, and the team should eventually seek a consensus endorsement from the faculty.

The vision statement is somewhat general in nature, providing a broad glimpse at the proposed future of the school. The vision provides members with a sense of what they want to be, making it easier for them to develop a plan to make the vision reality. Just as travelers find it easier to plan their route once they know where they

are going, it is easier for a school to establish and implement a school improvement plan once members have a sense or vision of what they want.

For school members to actualize the vision for their school, they must identify specific goals that will help them become what they want to become. A well-written vision statement will naturally present goal statements that reflect the values and beliefs of the faculty. Once organizational goals are identified, the faculty should carefully consider each goal within the larger context of their school's future. The school improvement team should facilitate conversations aimed at fine-tuning the goals to best meet the needs of the school. Faculty endorsement of the goal statements is essential.

Once the faculty members identify and embrace organizational goals, the school improvement team must lead the development of detailed action plans aimed at accomplishing each of the broad goals. Each action plan should describe:

- What must be done to accomplish each task
- What parties are responsible for getting the task accomplished
- When the task must be accomplished.

In a traditional strategic planning model, the school improvement teams carefully consider each goal, compose detailed action plans to accomplish the goals, and submit plans to the faculty for endorsement. Because such a process excludes faculty-wide participation in the process and ignores the systemic nature of schools, some strategic planning models recommend the creation of several task forces, each responsible for a specific goal. While such strategic planning may appear efficient, it does not promote all faculty members' involvement with all goals.

From the outside, a school is often seen as a comprehensive unit, excelling at some things (i.e. literacy development, interscholastic sports) and being less effective or ineffective at others (i.e. adviser/advisee programs, development of critical thinking skills). When members view their school as a comprehensive unit, they often approach problems by examining discrepancies between where they currently are (baseline data) and where they want to be. Schools tend to address such differences in a direct yet isolated manner (i.e. adopting a new textbook), as if the area of focus is detached from other aspects of the schooling process.

Schools cannot be examined solely as a comprehensive unit, nor can they be considered as a total comprised of isolated parts. A school is a system—"a perceived whole whose elements 'hang together' because they continually affect each other over time and operate toward a common purpose" (Senge, 1995, p. 90). Schools are comprised of interdependent subsystems (i.e. curriculum/instruction, leadership, resources, staff development) that are essential to the schooling process. Any potential action taken within systems "will produce some desired results and (almost certainly) some unintended consequences somewhere else in the system" (Senge, 1995, p. 91). To achieve improvement in a system, members must examine their goals through the lenses of the various subsystems, thoughtfully considering the intended and unintended consequences of their actions.

In the systemic process described here, schools must first identify broad organizational components that are essential to their success—subsystems such as curriculum and instruction, school leadership, resources, and staff development. These critical components become the lenses that faculty use to examine the most effective approaches to achieving schoolwide goals.

The vehicle for exploring these components is the focus team. All faculty members participate on at least one focus team. The focus teams thoroughly examine each broad organizational goal through the lens of their organizational component. Focus team members draft suggested action plans to accomplish each goal, viewing

goals through the lens of their focus team role throughout the process, even when the goals are not directly related to their area of concentration. As a result, each goal is examined through a number of lenses (each organizational component focus team) and each focus team writes action plans to accomplish the same set of goals. This process acknowledges the interdependence of subsystems within the school, providing several sets of plans to accomplish the same goals. The school improvement team is responsible for analyzing the separate action plans submitted by focus teams, looking for overlaps and omissions, and synthesizing the individual plans into one schoolwide set of action plans.

Faculty members are integral to this systemic improvement process. The foundation of the school improvement plan—the basis on which all decisions are made—is the list of shared values and beliefs. All members of the organization must be involved in generating this list; members who believe in and support the groundwork on which they build tend to believe in and support subsequent results of the process. Each phase in the process and each document that stems from improvement efforts should directly reflect what the faculty values and believes about effective schooling. The generation of shared values and beliefs provides challenging and exciting opportunities for colleagues to discuss their personal assumptions. Open discourse among faculty members is critical to the development of a collaborative school culture.

The generation of values and beliefs promotes the inclusion of teachers in the initial phase of the improvement process, and the systemic approach to the development of action plans calls for teachers to remain active well into implementation of the plan. Every teacher in the building should be included on an organizational component focus team, whether they volunteer or are assigned to a team. Faculty participation on focus teams ensures that all teachers work with their colleagues in discussing organizational goals and in writing action plans. Teachers show a greater commitment to change when they feel a sense of ownership in development of the plans.

Successful school improvement requires the commitment and support of most, if not all, members of the school community. In most school improvement efforts, it is the teachers who are most affected by changes. Likewise, it is often the teachers who directly influence whether a change effort fails or succeeds. From a leadership standpoint, it is thus beneficial to invite and even expect participation of all teachers in every phase of the school improvement process.

Oak Creek's Process

Values and Beliefs

The Oak Creek School Improvement Team members worked with their colleagues to identify and discuss faculty members' values and beliefs. The following describes how they accomplished that task:

1. Faculty members spent five minutes silently recording their personal values and beliefs on Post-It notes.
2. The faculty members were divided into small groups, bringing their personal lists of values and beliefs to the group.
3. Within their groups, members discussed their values/beliefs, creating a brainstormed list of group values and beliefs that they recorded on chart paper.
4. Each group shared values/beliefs from its list. Members of the school improvement team recorded group responses on chart paper. To eliminate repetition, concepts were submitted and recorded only once. The pages of chart paper responses were taped to the walls around the room.
5. Individual faculty members were given 10 self-adhesive dots and asked to read the

responses posted on the wall and "spend" their 10 dots on the values and beliefs they felt most strongly about by placing a dot next to an important value/belief. Each teacher could vote once for 10 statements or vote more than once for a statement that was particularly important to them.

6. Over the next few days, the school improvement team studied the input from the staff members and identified the values/beliefs statements that were most strongly supported by the faculty as a whole. These items were presented to the faculty in the form of a survey.
7. The survey was designed to obtain two types of input. The statements were listed in the middle of the page. On the left side was a five-point scale that asked the degree to which the individual teacher valued the statement. On the right side was another five-point scale asking the degree to which that value/belief was reflected in what the teachers currently do in their school.
8. The school improvement team scored the surveys and used the data to generate a concise list of values and beliefs most strongly supported by the faculty.
9. In a large group setting, the faculty provided feedback to the team and endorsed the Oak Creek Values and Beliefs Statements.

Vision and Goals

The Oak Creek School Improvement Team implemented a specific set of strategies to engage faculty in the development of their vision statement and the schoolwide goals that fit that vision statement. The following describes how they proceeded:

1. The school improvement team studied the faculty-approved values/beliefs statements looking for basic concepts that most clearly defined what the faculty felt most strongly about. They consciously looked for "concepts" rather than specific value statements as the basis for their vision. The search for concepts allowed them to blend multiple value statements to clarify what they wanted to become as a school.
2. Once concepts were identified, team members composed a series of sentences that described a school representing what the faculty most strongly believed in and valued. To maintain a focus toward the future, sentences began with, "Oak Creek Middle School will...".
3. The vision statement was presented to the faculty for critique. Faculty members discussed the statement in small groups and shared their comments with the whole faculty. Members of the school improvement team took notes on chart paper and used those notes to fine-tune the vision statement after the meeting.
4. Once the near-final draft of the vision statement was written, the school improvement team gleaned organizational goals from the vision statement, making sure to respect the original intent of the schoolwide values and belief statements.
5. The "final draft" of the vision statement and organizational goals were presented to the faculty for critique. Again, the school improvement team used a whole-faculty setting and small groups to create discussion and obtain feedback about the document. The school improvement team used that input from the faculty and finalized the school's current vision statement and the goals to accomplish that vision.

Action Plans

The final step in the process for Oak Creek's School Improvement Team was to decide how

they would involve faculty in the development of strategies to accomplish the goals. Typically, strategic planning teams appoint task forces to define how to accomplish each goal and shepherd the accomplishment of the goal. But that process only involves a few people and engages them only on one issue or goal. The Oak Creek team wanted true systemic involvement of all faculty. Following is a description of how they proceeded:

1. The Oak Creek School Improvement Team identified five organizational components that were critical to the everyday success of their school: instructional pedagogy (teaching, learning, curriculum, and assessment), professional development, resources, management, and research. These five areas became the schools "focus teams."
2. The team prepared a statement that defined the role of the focus team for each of the five critical components in their school.
3. The team discussed whether each teacher should have the opportunity to volunteer for a team or whether the teachers should be appointed to a team. The team decided that each teacher in their building should have the opportunity to sign up for the focus team of his or her choice. Teachers who chose not to volunteer for a focus team would be assigned to one. At least one member of the school improvement team was assigned to each focus team.
4. At a faculty meeting, the school improvement team described the role of each of the focus teams and the organizational components. According to the established protocol, teachers signed up for, or were assigned to, focus teams.
5. Each focus team carefully examined the organizational goals only through the lens of its critical component (i.e. instructional pedagogy). Teams wrote action plans for each goal, identifying what needed to occur within their component to effectively accomplish each goal.
6. After each focus team drafted a set of action plans for each organizational goal, the school improvement team studied the drafts for omissions and overlap. The team merged the five separate action plan drafts into one schoolwide action plan that would systematically address each organizational goal. The schoolwide action plan identified the strategies necessary for accomplishing each goal, the person or persons responsible for each strategy, and the time frame for accomplishing the strategy.
7. The "final draft" of the schoolwide action plan was presented to the faculty for discussion and feedback. Again, the school improvement team used a whole-faculty setting with small group discussions to obtain input about the document. The school improvement team collected that input and used it to finalize the school's action plan.

Dealing With Dissension: Not Everyone Wants Change

Regardless of how well prepared an improvement team is for schoolwide change, members will no doubt encounter colleagues who do not want change to occur in their school. Dissension often comes from a lack of understanding or support from those who are expected to do the most work and face the brunt of changes. Teachers sometimes resist change because of negative experiences they have had in the past—with colleagues, leadership, or the change process itself. Other teachers avoid change because they prefer things the way they are or are too lazy to put forth the effort neces-

sary to successfully use new ideas and/or methods. The most frequent reason for opposition, however, is fear of the unknown. Change requires individuals to abandon their comfort zone of what they know and understand. The school improvement team should work with the faculty members to publicly recognize the difficulties of change and to address members' assumptions and fears.

Conversations about change can help faculty members remain open to new ideas as they venture into the unknown. In addition to facilitating these conversations, the school improvement team should remain cognizant of potential hurdles before they become barriers to improvement. Perhaps the biggest obstacle facing educators as they implement change – the pervading culture that exists in many schools—one bent on maintaining the status quo.

Despite continued efforts at reform and improvement, teachers historically have tended to avoid change (Maeroff, 1993). Educators in many schools are socialized to fit in, to preserve current practice and the professional integrity of their co-workers, thus maintaining the status quo (Hoy and Woolfolk, 1990). Experienced teachers often "ensure that the newcomer does not disrupt the ongoing activity on the scene, embarrass or cast disparaging light on others, or question too many of the established cultural solutions worked out previously" (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979, p. 211). Teachers avoid changes because they learn, both subtly and overtly, that the system does not want to be disturbed.

A Slow, Steady Journey: Meaningful Change Takes Time

The most critical determinant of a school's success is its culture (Gruenert, 1998). By definition, culture refers to "the building beliefs and expectations evident in the way a school operates, particularly in reference to how people relate (or fail to relate) to each other" (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996, p. 37). Culture is not something one can see. It is an "intangible, pervasive presence of being that is felt by members of the organization. It is to an organization what personality is to a human being" (Valentine, 1992, p. 8). It is difficult to change one's personality and it is equally difficult to change the culture of a school, especially in a short period of time. It takes at least four to seven years for a school to realize the sustained benefits of a continuous change effort (Speck, 1996). The road to meaningful change is not a short one.

School change can take different forms. Many individuals who initially support school change are often only in favor of what Cuban (1983) refers to as first-order changes. Such changes "improve the efficiency and effectiveness of what is currently done without disturbing the basic organizational features and without substantially altering the way that children and adults perform their roles" (p. 341-344). Individuals are naturally apt to support first-order changes because they provide easier and more immediate results, usually lead to more efficiency and effectiveness, and require little-to-no significant effort on their part.

Because the organizational, pedagogical, and cultural components of the school go basically untouched, teachers and administrators can typically maintain the status quo without venturing into the unknown realities of meaningful change. This meaningful change is what Cuban (1983) calls second-order change. Schools undergoing second-order change "seek to alter the fundamental ways in which organizations are put together, including the formation of new goals, structures, and roles" (p. 341-344).

All members of the school community must realize the systemic nature of improvement and understand that change must be a slow, steady journey that takes place over an extended period of time. Meaningful change cannot be mandated, nor can it be rushed. The team and the faculty must suppress urges to accelerate the process even when there is pressure, internally or externally, to show immediate results. Many building-level leaders cannot wait four to seven years to realize significant changes in their school, especially if change efforts are initiated at the district level. The school improvement team should systematically advise district-level personnel and community members about change efforts occurring in their school. School leadership, in the form of the improvement team, must help those outside the school understand the process, helping to ensure the continuous success of the school.

Summary

Did you recognize your school in one or more of these three schools? Does your school approach change like Pine Ridge, with little faculty involvement, decision making by administration only, and little faculty awareness of the process of change? Or, does your school look more like Riverside, where only a few "chosen" faculty are involved in the change process and little ownership is felt by the faculty.

We hope your school approaches change in a manner similar to Oak Ridge. A faculty school improvement team leads the process, all faculty are actively involved in establishing the direction of the school and the strategies for accomplishing that vision, and all faculty engage meaningfully in what they value and believe to be important for students at Oak Ridge. Only through these efforts at meaningful faculty involvement can a school achieve second-order change and become a true learning organization.

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Appendix I

Analyzing Your School's Change Process

Can all staff describe the change process we use in our school?

Is our process for change led by a school improvement team of respected, competent teacher leaders?

How does our process meaningfully engage all staff in direction setting, decisions, and implementation?

Do our teachers engage regularly in conversations about what we value in the schooling process?

Are the conversations in our school positive discussions about strategies for change and improvement or negative discussions about irritations and frustrations with students?

Do our teachers view our school's change efforts as mandated?

Does our school have external support to provide ideas, knowledge, and strategies for school improvement?

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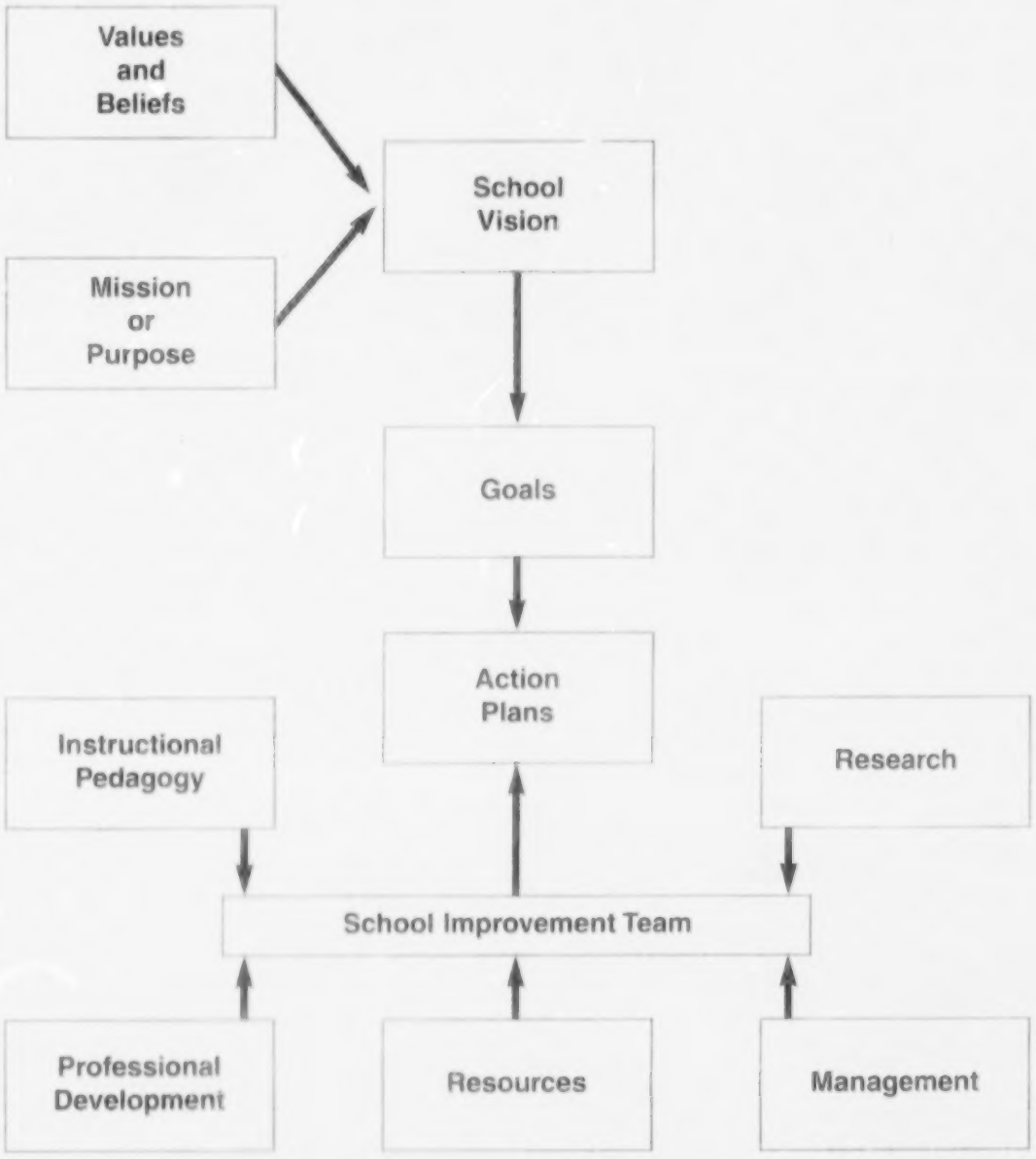
Appendix II

Systemic School Improvement



This basic schema for school improvement is from the systemic change processes used by the Middle Level Leadership Center, University of Missouri. For more specific information about this process for change, visit the MLLC website at mllc.org.

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